

# *Report*

## Theodore Roosevelt National Park

### ■ 1.0 Site Description

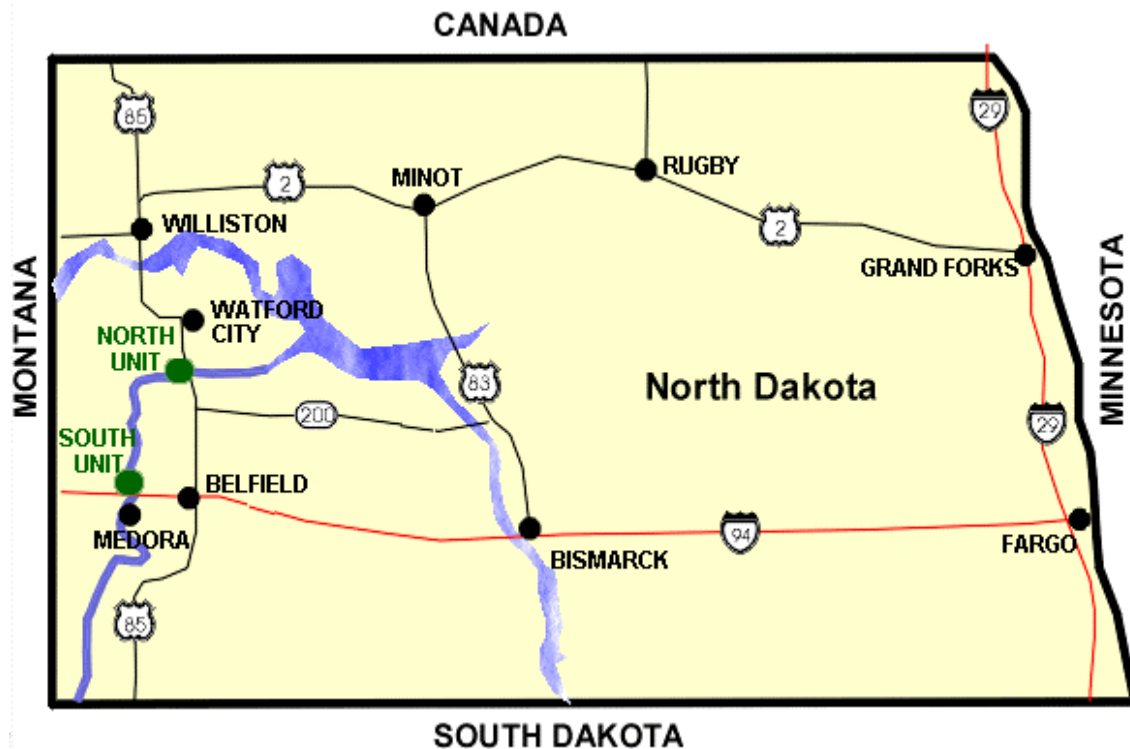
#### Bison Crossing at the Theodore Roosevelt National Park



The Theodore Roosevelt National Park is located in western North Dakota (see Figure 1). On April 25, 1947, President Truman signed a bill that created the Theodore Roosevelt National Memorial Park. At the Memorial's creation, lands consisted of the South Unit and the Elkhorn Ranch sites. The North Unit was later added to the Memorial on June 12, 1948. Additional boundary revisions to the Memorial were made in subsequent years.

In addition to a connection with Theodore Roosevelt, the area was also recognized for its diverse cultural and natural resources. On November 10, 1978, the area was given *National Park* status when President Carter signed Public Law 95-625 that changed the Memorial to Theodore Roosevelt National Park. This same law placed 29,920 acres of the Park under the National Wilderness Preservation System. Today, the 70,448-acre Park is home to a variety of plants and animals, and continues to memorialize the 26th president for his enduring contributions to the safekeeping and protection of our nation's resources.

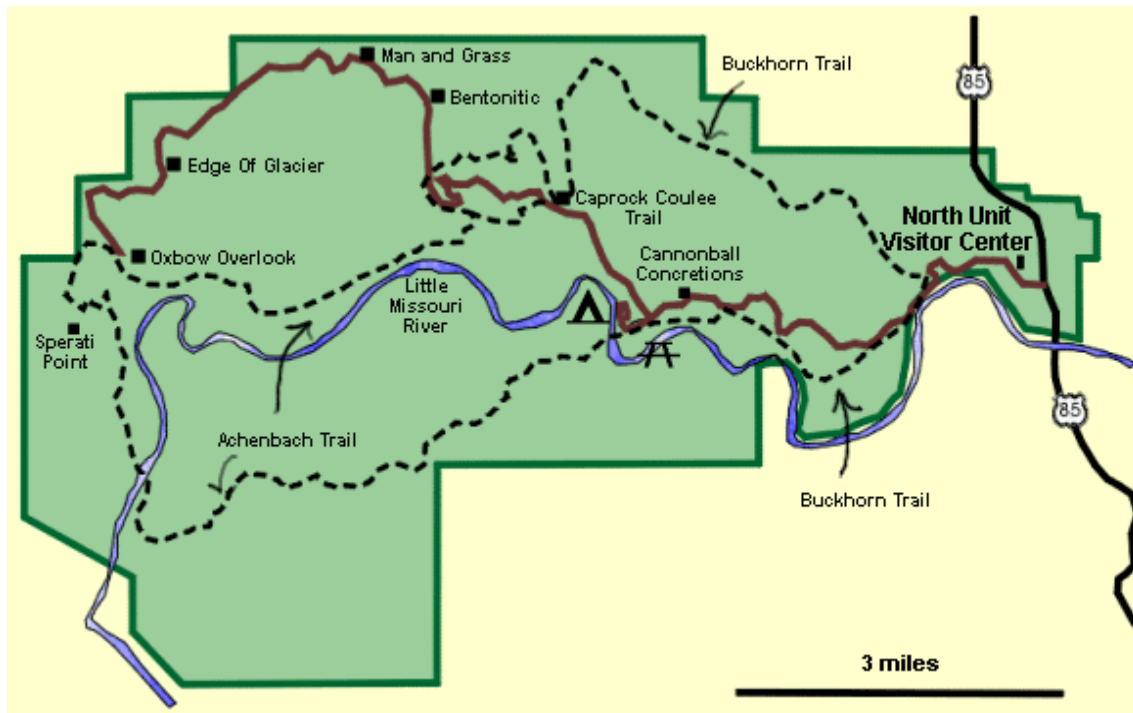
Figure 1. Location of the Theodore Roosevelt National Park



The North Unit is located near Watford City adjacent to U.S. 85 (see Figure 2). A Visitor Center is located near the Park entrance with 10 parking spaces available for cars and three available for buses or recreational vehicles (RVs). A 14-mile two-way *Scenic Drive* starts at the Visitor Center and ends at the Oxbow Overlook. There are various turnouts and informal parking areas associated with the scenic drive. Some popular attraction locations along the way include Longhorn Pullout, Slump Block Pullout, and River Bend Overlook. Park staff has observed that approximately 40 to 50 percent of the vehicles traveling the scenic drive turn back at River Bend Outlook, and the rest complete the 14-mile one-way drive.

The North Unit also has an extensive trail network including:

- **Little Mo Nature Trail** – This self-guiding nature trail, which begins at the North Unit Campground, provides access to both river woodlands and badlands;
- **Achenbach Trail** – Also beginning at the North Unit Campground, this trail climbs from river bottomland to Oxbow Overlook and returns along the river bottom to the campground;
- **Caprock Coulee Nature Trail** – This is a 1.6-mile self-guided trail west of the North Unit Juniper Campground;
- **Upper Caprock Coulee Trail** – This is a loop trail from the self-guided portion of the Caprock Coulee Nature Trail;

**Figure 2. Location of the North Unit**

- **Buckhorn Trail** – This 11-mile loop trail can be reached from the Caprock Coulee Nature Trailhead; and
- **Sperati Point** – This trail from Oxbow Overlook, which is a portion of the Achenbach Trail, leads to the narrowest gateway of the badlands.

There are also approximately 50 campsites located throughout the North Unit.

The South Unit is 67 miles south of the North Unit and 130 miles west of Bismarck. As shown in Figure 3, when traveling west on I-94, one's first introduction to the Park is the Painted Canyon Overlook, about seven miles east of Medora. The South Unit Visitor Center is located near I-94. The Visitor Center parking lot can accommodate approximately 250 cars. At the overlook location with the Visitor Center, restrooms, picnic shelters, tables, and water are available to persons from April through October.

During the winter months, a short walk provides access to the South Unit when the Visitor Center is closed. Other visitor facilities and attractions include a museum in the Medora Visitor Center that displays the personal items of Theodore Roosevelt, ranching artifacts, and natural history exhibits. The restored Maltese Cross cabin, which was Roosevelt's first ranch house in the badlands, is located near the Visitor Center.

A major feature of the South Unit is a paved, 36-mile, *Scenic Loop Drive* with interpretive signs that explain some of the Park's historical and natural phenomena. The major attractions include:

**Figure 3. Location of the South Unit**

- **The DeMores State Historic Site** – Near the town of Medora is the 27-room chateau that the Marquis DeMores, an acquaintance of Theodore Roosevelt, built for his wife in 1884. Tours of the chateau are usually offered from late May through September.
- **The Medora Visitor Center** – A fee station, amphitheater, and Roosevelt’s Maltese Cross Cabin are located near the Visitor Center.
- **Skyline Vista** – This is a lookout area with parking areas that can accommodate up to 30 cars.
- **Scoria Point** – The main attraction is the soil erosion that has caused removal of the softer earth and left the bluffs capped with a harder, more resistant material. This area has eight parking spaces.
- **Ridgeline Nature Trail** – This 0.6-mile self-guiding loop trail provides information about the badlands scenery and ecology and about the role of fire, wind, and water in this area.
- **North Dakota Badlands** – Looking across Paddock Creek, visitors can observe a field of bumps. Erosion has worn away all but the hardest materials, leaving a maze of buttes and canyons. This area has eight parking spaces.

- **Coal Vein Trail** – From 1951 until early 1977 a fire burned in this area in a coal seam. The intense heat baked the adjacent clay and sand, significantly altering the appearance of the terrain.
- **Buck Hill** – A short walk from the *Scenic Loop Drive* leads to this hill, which has an elevation of 2,855 feet.
- **Boicourt Overlook** – One of the best views of the badlands in the Park is from this overlook.
- **Wind Canyon** – A short trail up the ridge leads to an overlook of both a graceful bend in the Little Missouri River and also the wind-sculpted sands of the canyon.
- **Jones Creek Trail** – This 3.7-mile trail leads through the heart of the badlands and reaches the Scenic Loop Drive at two points.
- **Peaceful Valley** – This was the site of a horse ranch during the 1880s heyday of cattle ranching.
- **Petrified Forest** – The greatest collection of petrified wood in the Park can be reached only by foot or on horseback.

The third unit is the Elkhorn Ranch approximately 35 miles north of the South Unit. The only access to the ranch is through a gravel road. This area receives very little visitation.

The Park entrance fee – good for seven days and at both Units – is \$10 per vehicle or \$5.00 per person. Fees are collected at the entrance station at the North Unit Visitor Center and the Medora Visitor Center in the South Unit.

The Theodore Roosevelt National Park is mainly a “pass-through” Park. For example, many visitors on their way to Yellowstone or Glacier National Parks (or other areas) stop off at the Park to enjoy the scenery. The sudden change of topography along westbound I-94 also draws visitors into the Park.

Last year, an average of 450,000 visitors visited one of the two units. Over the last few years, visitation has been relatively stable. The Park estimated that approximately 60 percent of the total visitation last year visited the South Unit, while the rest visited the North Unit. Rarely did visitors visit both units on the same trip.

The breakdown of annual visitation shows that the Painted Canyon Visitor Center was the most visited attraction (250,000 annual visitors), followed by the Medora Visitor Center (110,000 annual visitors), and the North Unit Visitor Center (85,000 annual visitors). Only 200 to 300 persons annually visit Elkhorn Ranch. The peak season occurs in the summer between June to September with a spring and fall shoulder season. Visitors are typically from North Dakota, Minnesota, or Minneapolis/St. Paul. They tend to travel in family groups. The last visitor survey was conducted in the mid-1980s and no accurate profile of recent visitors is available.

## ■ 2.0 Existing ATS

There are no existing Alternative Transportation Systems (ATS) or any direct public transit service to the Park. All visitors use private automobiles to access the Park.

## ■ 3.0 ATS Needs

There does not appear to be any need for an ATS. Since the access roads are rarely congested, and parking availability is not a problem, there is no incentive for visitors to switch to an alternative mode from their cars. Furthermore, visitation is expected to remain fairly constant in the near future. The remoteness and spread of the different sites also make any form of ATS infeasible.

## ■ 4.0 Basis for ATS Needs

There is no basis for ATS needs.

## ■ 5.0 Bibliography

The Theodore Roosevelt NP Web site ([http://www.nps.gov/thro/tr\\_info.htm](http://www.nps.gov/thro/tr_info.htm)).

The North Unit Web site ([http://www.nps.gov/thro/tr\\_north.htm](http://www.nps.gov/thro/tr_north.htm)).

The South Unit Web site ([http://www.nps.gov/thro/tr\\_south.htm](http://www.nps.gov/thro/tr_south.htm)).

## ■ 6.0 Persons Interviewed

Noel Poe, Superintendent, Theodore Roosevelt National Park